

Since the sequencing of the human genome was completed in April 2003, researchers have identified genetic markers for a variety of chronic health condition. For example, a genetic test can tell a woman with a family history of breast cancer if she has the genetic mutation that can cause it long before the cancer develops.

Armed with information that he or she is at risk for a certain disease, an individual could enroll in clinical trials and further scientific research. Moreover, he or she could make very important decisions on when to engage in preventative care or seek early treatment. This could dramatically improve the individual's health and quality of life and reduce the cost of health care.

Unfortunately, ongoing genetic discrimination – employers and health insurers improperly using private genetic information - is discouraging many men and women from being tested and participating in clinical trials.

For this reason, I have worked tirelessly for the past thirteen years to pass the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA), legislation that I authored to prohibit discrimination by an employer or health insurer because of a person's genetic information.

This critical bill recognizes that no one has perfect genes and that we are all potential victims of genetic discrimination. What's more, GINA guarantees that all Americans have the right to access and act on valuable genetic information without fear of losing their job or health insurance.

GINA, the first civil rights legislation of this century, will stamp out a form of discrimination while also allowing us to realize the tremendous life-saving and life-altering potential of genetic research. The important protections assured by GINA will enable the scientific and medical communities to make the critical medical breakthroughs of the twenty-first century.

I am pleased to say that after years of legislative wrangling, this new Democratic Congress made GINA a priority. Last Thursday, the Senate passed the bill by an overwhelming vote of 95-0. The House will take up the bill as early as this week, and since GINA has garnered strong bi-partisan support, I expect that it will be passed easily.

We live in a dynamic age of rapid scientific discovery and technological growth. For too long, Americans have been discouraged from taking advantage of the advances made in the field of genetics. After thirteen long years, GINA is finally on the brink of becoming law, and we all will have to wait no longer.